

Numbers 22:1-22 - Thursday, November 11th, 2010

- Beginning here in Numbers chapter 22 and through chapter 25 we are introduced to an interesting individual by the name of Balaam.
- This Balaam is hired by Balak, King of the Moabites to pronounce a spiritual curse on the Israelites so they could be destroyed in battle.
- What makes this so interesting is that there are many references to Balaam in the scriptures, in both the Old and the New Testament.

Deuteronomy 23:4-5 because they did not meet you with bread and water on the road when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. 5 Nevertheless the LORD your God would not listen to Balaam, but the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loves you. NKJV

Revelation 2:14 But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. NKJV

22:1 Then the children of Israel moved, and camped in the plains of Moab on the side of the Jordan across from Jericho. 2 Now Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. 3 And Moab was exceedingly afraid of the people because they were many, and Moab was sick with dread because of the children of Israel. 4 So Moab said to the elders of Midian, "Now this company will lick up everything around us, as an ox licks up the grass of the field." And Balak the son of Zippor was king of the Moabites at that time. 5 Then he sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor at Pethor, which is near the River in the land of the sons of his people, to call him, saying: "Look, a people has come from Egypt. See, they cover the face of the earth, and are settling next to me!

- Balak is threatened by and becoming "exceedingly afraid" and even "sick with dread" because of the numbers of the children of Israel.
- His fear is that the Israelites were so large in numbers that they would lick up everything like and ox licks up the grass of the field.
- It is because of this fear of the Israelites that this King of the Moabites is motivated to send messengers to Balaam seeking his help.
- Now before we move on, I think we would be grossly remiss were we not to look at a number of life lessons as it relates to our fears.

- First, fear is a powerful motivator. Balak will now do anything and everything with anyone, stopping at nothing. Fear knows no bounds.
- Fear should never be that which motivates a child of God, unless it's a reverent fear of the Lord which comes from our faith in the Lord.
- In other words, we are motivated by our faith, not our fear, because He has not given us a spirit of fear, which is the antithesis of faith.

- Second, fear is unnecessary. The fact is that Balak did not have to fear the Israelites because they were not a threat to the Moabites.
- The problem is, Balak hadn't "heard" the "Word" of God commanding the Israelites to not contend with, or battle against, the Moabites.

Deuteronomy 2:8-9 "And when we passed beyond our brethren, the descendants of Esau who dwell in Seir, away from the road of the plain, away from Elath and Ezion Geber, we turned and passed by way of the Wilderness of Moab. Then the LORD said to me, 'Do not harass Moab, nor contend with them in battle, for I will not give you *any* of their land *as* a possession, because I have given Ar to the descendants of Lot *as* a possession.' " NKJV

- The lesson here is quite clear in that faith pushes out fear and in order to have that faith instead of fear one must hear the Word of God.

Romans 10:17 So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. NKJV

- There's a third lesson here, as it relates to fear, and it's that our fears propel us to fabricate scenarios that have no basis in any reality.
- It's interesting to note in verse two where we were told how Balak's fears started when he saw what the Israelites had done to the Amorites.
- In so doing, he starts imagining a worst case scenario where the Israelites do to the Moabites that which they had done to the Amorites.
- The reality is the Amorites were the enemies of the Moabites, and the Israelites have actually done Balak a favor. That's the reality.

"Yet Balak ought to have rejoiced, for the Amorites had been their great enemies, and Israel had put them down: but men who are bent on opposing God's servants are under such and infatuation that they know not their own mercies." Charles Spurgeon

6 Therefore please come at once, curse this people for me, for they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land, for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed."

- Balak's fear forces him to take matters into his own hands and hire Balaam to curse the Israelites so he can drive them out of the land.
- Perhaps this would be a good place to sort of round a corner and get to know Balaam and his powers along with Balak and his fears.
- Balaam is in every sense of the word, and enigma. We really know nothing about where he comes from or even who he really is.
- The text seems to indicate he knows the God of Israel which we'll see shortly in verse 8, but we don't know that he's actually an Israelite.

- One commentator said of him; "I can't figure Balaam out. He's talked about in the Books of Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Nehemiah, Micah, Peter, Jude and Revelation. In fact he's talked about much more than is Mary, the mother of Jesus - and yet he remains a mystery." (Jon Courson)

- What's not a mystery is we know that whoever he blesses is blessed, and whoever he curses is cursed, and that's why Balak hires him.

7 So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the diviner's fee in their hand, and they came to Balaam and spoke to him the words of Balak.

- This is where it starts to get interesting. Both the Moabite and Midianite elders come to Balaam with his "diviner's fee in their hand."
- This would indicate that, before approaching Balaam, Balak had already formed an alliance with the Midianites against the Israelites.
- Again, there's a lesson here as it relates to our fear in that we, like Balak, are prone to form these ungodly alliances with our Midianites.

8 And he said to them, "Lodge here tonight, and I will bring back word to you, as the LORD speaks to me." So the princes of Moab stayed with Balaam.

- Apparently this "diviner's fee" appealed to the greed of Balaam because he makes his first mistake by inviting them to lodge overnight.
- It's always a mistake to invite greed into our lives, and how much more perilous is it for us to allow greed to lodge overnight in our lives.
- Greed will now lodge in the room right next to "the love of money," and become the root of all the evil that Balaam will do because of it.

1 Timothy 6:10-11 For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of* evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. (11) But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. NKJV

- Balaam, who personifies the love of money, will pursue Balak, who personifies evil and because of it, what he pursues will pursue him.

Proverbs 13:21 Evil pursues sinners, But to the righteous, good shall be repaid. NKJV

Proverbs 11:19 As righteousness *leads* to life, So he who pursues evil *pursues it* to his own death. NKJV

9 Then God came to Balaam and said, "Who are these men with you?"

- God isn't asking Balaam to introduce these men to Him because he really didn't know who they were, rather He's being merciful to him.
- If you really think about it, God is actually giving Balaam an opportunity to come clean by not pursuing this evil with these evil men.
- It's important to note that the text in no way mentions that Balaam seeks God on the matter, rather it's God Who comes to Balaam.

"Probably Balaam was surprised beyond measure that God should actually come to him. He had been a mere magician, but now for awhile the true prophetic spirit filled him."
Charles Spurgeon

10 So Balaam said to God, "Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent to me, saying, 11'Look, a people has come out of Egypt, and they cover the face of the earth. Come now, curse them for me; perhaps I shall be able to overpower them and drive them out.'"

- This is actually humorous. Does Balaam really believe that he's informing God about what's happening because God doesn't know?
- No, here's why; I believe that Balaam is putting his spin on it and in so doing he's painting himself on the canvass of his own innocence.
- The reason is because he plays dumb by not mentioning the Israelites by name, and points out that he's the one who was sought out.
- Lest we be too hard on Balaam, we should consider that this is what we do all the time because of the Adamic sin nature in all of us.

12 And God said to Balaam, "You shall not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they are blessed."

- I honestly don't know how this could be more clear. God just say's; "no, you shall not go, and you shall not curse the people."
- The Lord takes it even a step further and tells him why it's a "no go." He tells Balaam that he shall not curse them "for they are blessed."
- In other words, even if he wanted to he couldn't and the reason he can't is because God has already pronounced a blessing on them.
- It's vital that we know this because of what's about to happen beginning in the next verse. The fact that he can't, won't stop Balaam.

13 So Balaam rose in the morning and said to the princes of Balak, "Go back to your land, for the LORD has refused to give me permission to go with you."

- Notice "how" he says "what" he says here. It's actually quite subtle and very crafty. In effect, he says; "I want to, but God won't let me!"
- This truly exposes the evil that has taken up residence in his heart. He should have said, no, I will not go because this is evil and sinful.
- So why does Balaam do this, this way? Because of his love of money! That's the root cause of all the evil we're about to see play out.
- Here again it is vital that we know this because of what happens next. By saying it this, this way, he's baiting them to negotiate with him.

14 And the princes of Moab rose and went to Balak, and said, "Balaam refuses to come with us." 15 Then Balak again sent princes, more numerous and more honorable than they.

- So now we see how Balak takes Balaam's bait and sends not only more men, but more honorable men. Wow, who's playing who?
- The reason I say that is because Balaam is playing on Balak's worries and fears, and Balak is playing on Balaam's greed and pride.

16 And they came to Balaam and said to him, "Thus says Balak the son of Zippor: 'Please let nothing hinder you from coming to me; 17 for I will certainly honor you greatly, and I will do whatever you say to me. Therefore please come, curse this people for me.'"

- It's important to understand that when they tell him that Balak "will certainly honor him greatly," it means it will be a huge honorarium.
- This is a text book counter offer that goes as far as saying; "name your price," and I will pay whatever you want to curse this people.

18 Then Balaam answered and said to the servants of Balak, "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more.

- This is classic. Balaam counters Balak's; "name your price" with; "what are you willing to pay?" Even hinting as to how much it will take.
- He does this by saying; "even if it's as much as all the silver and gold that you could fill your house with, that won't be good enough."

- One has to wonder why Balaam is being so deceptive when he knows he can't curse them no matter how much money Balak pays him.
- I would suggest one reason he does this is because he can't resist the temptation of getting rich, because his god is the god of money.
- This prophet is all about the profit, thus what he pursues, pursues him, and because he himself is deceived, so too will he now deceive.

19 Now therefore, please, you also stay here tonight, that I may know what more the LORD will say to me."

- This is ridiculous. It's as if Balaam tells them to spend the night again so he can take their counter offer to God to see what He says.
- This is not only ridiculous, this is wickedness by virtue of the fact that God has already said no, yet Balaam continues to pursue the sin.
- It's important to know that he's not seeking the mind of God, he's seeking to change the mind of God, because his mind is made up.
- Lest we be too hard on this sinful man we would do well to see ourselves in him. We too continue to pursue sin if our mind is made up.

20 And God came to Balaam at night and said to him, "If the men come to call you, rise and go with them; but only the word which I speak to you -- that you shall do."

- This is most interesting. God knowing Balaam's heart comes to him, and says to him; "go, but only speak that which I speak to you."
- Now, I am keenly aware that at first glance it may appear that God has changed His mind however, that is absolutely not the case here.
- God is not giving in, rather God's giving Balaam over to, the sin which he's already made up his mind to do, even though God said no!.

One commentator said it best when they wrote; "We know that sometimes, God says 'no' to the prayers of His people, because He loves them. But also, sometimes God says 'yes' to the desires of the wicked, because He will judge them."

"He wanted to go, for he loved the wages of unrighteousness, and to try him, he has a conditional permit to go if the princes come again and press him, but not else. We shall see in our next reading how his evil heart broke this gentle bond. He was a great man, an enlightened man, and for a while a supernaturally endowed man, but a grain of grace would have been of more value to him than all this, and for lack of it he perished miserably. O Lord, give us grace rather than the rarest endowments."

Charles Spurgeon

21 So Balaam rose in the morning, saddled his donkey, and went with the princes of Moab.

- One has suggested that Balaam no doubt got up first thing in the morning and was very excited because he thought he convinced God.
- Also, it's important to note how conspicuously absent from the narrative is any mention that Balak's men come to him or call upon him.
- Why is that important? Because, God gave him permission to go, if Balak's men pressured him. This may explain what we'll read next.

"It does not seem that the princes pressed him to go, it would rather appear that they started off before him; they were evidently on before when the angel met him. A covetous man needs no tempting, he is ready for anything."

Charles Spurgeon

22 Then God's anger was aroused because he went, and the Angel of the LORD took His stand in the way as an adversary against him. And he was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him.

- It shouldn't come as any surprise to us when we read that God became angry and, notice, an "Angel" of the Lord is sent against him.
- First, it's important to know that this "Angel" is a "Christophony," or a "Theophany," which is an appearance of Jesus Christ Himself.
- Also, the reason the Lord is standing against him, is because Balaam is going against the Lord. This is germane to our understanding.